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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: BORDER BRUHAHA NEARLY OVERSHADOWS URIBE VISIT AS
CHAVEZ SIDESTEPS FARC

REF: A. CARACAS 0028
[1](#)B. 08 CARACAS 986

Classified By: Francisco Fernandez Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4(d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez and Colombian President Alvaro Uribe held a brief meeting on April 14 in Caracas. Consistent with prior reporting (Ref B), the Colombian side was focused on trade and protecting the interests of Colombian businessmen and investors in Venezuela. In a follow-on press conference Chavez declared, "I'm not an ally of the FARC, I don't support the FARC, but I'm not their enemy." Local opposition media were abuzz on April 13 and 14 with news leaked by a senior naval officer serving on the Maritime Border Commission, alleging a secret agreement ceding the majority of the disputed area in the Gulf of Venezuela to Colombia. The two countries closed the brief summit with five preliminary agreements on exports, energy, finance and banking. Following the meeting with his Colombian counterpart, Chavez publicly harangued the opposition, Catholic Church and media, among others, in front of Uribe during the press conference. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) In the run up to the April 14 meeting between Chavez and Uribe, Venezuela's paper of record El Universal, reported Colombian Foreign Minister Jaime Bermudez listing energy, credit for small businesses, and restrictions on poultry products as themes that the Colombian delegation would be pursuing in Caracas. Colombian diplomats have told PolOff on several previous occasions that Uribe is following a pragmatic line with Chavez, concentrating on defending the 7-billion dollar trade relationship between the two nations.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Although not mentioned in any pre-summit interviews, the FARC was the first question to come up in the press conference. Uribe described Colombia's progress at length, adding he appreciated the "understanding" Chavez and the Venezuelan people had shown. Chavez immediately chimed in that he always discussed "sensitive" issues with Uribe, adding that the Venezuelan government "does not and would not support an armed movement in Colombia or any other part of the world." When asked later what efforts Venezuela was making at the Colombian border to help Colombia achieve peace, Chavez replied, "I've already answered that subject."

[1](#)4. (SBU) Chavez took advantage of the press conference to lambaste his opponents. Recalling his return to power seven years ago following a brief coup attempt, Chavez excoriated a Catholic cardinal for urging him to resign, and the Church in general, for supporting the coup. Chavez also accused the opposition media of openly encouraging subversion and belittled human rights groups for supporting "assassins", a reference to the eight police officers recently given harsh sentences.

15. (C) A report that Chavez was prepared to hand over a significant portion of the Gulf of Venezuela to Colombia dominated local headlines during Uribe's visit. (Note: The entrance to the Gulf of Venezuela has been a sore point between the two countries for more than 100 years, its location north of lake Maracaibo, is the source of much of Venezuela's oil exports. End Note.) According to retired admirals Huizi and Boecher, Venezuelan navy captain Fernando Nieves-Croes, a member of the current maritime border commission, leaked a memo detailing the new boundaries to the media, after receiving assurances of protection from the Navy High Command. Rocio San Miguel, a former member of the commission in the 1990s, told PolOff that an agreement was simply awaiting Chavez's signature. The corollary rumors surrounding this alleged agreement is that the new boundary concessions are either an incentive from Chavez or blackmail from Uribe to suppress further revelations from the Raul Reyes hard drives.

16. (C) Comment: The meeting between Chavez and Uribe lasted only a few hours on the afternoon of April 14. There were no substantive agreements, merely letters of intention to study the possibility of credit, energy sharing and development funds. Chavez continued to publicly distance himself from the FARC, although there are indicators that his government continues to aid and harbor the FARC and ELN. End Comment.
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